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RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 3763
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 8745
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 008156

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [MASS](#) [PTER](#) [KISL](#) [IN](#) [BG](#)

SUBJECT: RUMORS ABOUT BANGLADESH; MEA CONTINUES TO DENY AID
TO BURMA

REF: NEW DELHI 8126 NEW DELHI 7870

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11. (C) SUMMARY: MEA Joint Secretary (Bangladesh, Burma Sri Lanka, Maldives) Mohan Kumar informed PolCouns that rumors are rife in Dhaka that the U.S. wants neither Sheikh Hasina, leader of the Awami League (AL), nor Khaleda Zia, head of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), to win January's scheduled election and is actively supporting 2006 Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus. He also mused that the Bangladeshi elite speculate that the U.S. "fixed" the Nobel Prize for Yunus. Kumar expressed personal doubt at the possibility of the Bangladeshi military intervening to end the impasse between the two grand dames of Bangladeshi politics, but conceded Foreign Secretary Shivshankar Menon's fear that the military may become more involved in Bangladesh's political situation. Kumar noted that the GOI and U.S. were basically on the same page regarding the upcoming Bangladeshi elections, although differences remained on specifics regarding Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) involvement in the political mainstream. Kumar stressed that, "we need to make the same kind of noise regarding a credible voter list," or risk an AL boycott and election delay.

12. (C) Turning to Burma, when pressed by Polcouns, the JS insisted that he had checked with other branches of the GOI and remained firm that India is "not supplying lethal defense supplies" to the Burmese junta. Polcouns declared that Burma may be addressed by U/S Burns during his upcoming visit and recommended that the GOI be forthcoming regarding its relations with Burma in order to set the right precedent of

honest exchange between the U.S. and India.

----- Bangladesh: rumor trading -----

13. (C) In a 1 December meeting with Polcouns, the Ministry of External Affairs' Joint Secretary responsible for Bangladesh, Burma, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives, Mohan Kumar, claimed that GOI sources continue to report rumint that the U.S. is positioning 2006 Nobel Peace prize winner Muhammad Yunus to run in the upcoming Bangladeshi elections slated for January 21, 2007. According to Kumar, people in Dhaka speculate that the U.S. arranged for Yunus to win the Nobel Prize to enhance his political credentials. Although he professed that he did not subscribe to the allegations, Kumar stated that he wanted the U.S. to know that the rumors were rife in Dhaka. Polcouns declared that the GOI and U.S. hoped for the same in Bangladesh: free and credible elections without violence.

14. (C) When Polcouns asked Kumar about Delhi cocktail party chatter on the possibility of the Bangladeshi military intervening in the political stalemate between Hasina (AL) and Zia (BNP), Kumar commented that the upper echelons of the military were hand-picked by Zia, and he believed that they remain loyal to her. He also observed that the middle-levels of the military were fairly new and had no political role. Polcouns noted that Kumar's view was in contrast to Foreign Secretary Menon's message to DOD Under Secretary Edelman

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through an intermediary after their 18 November meeting that India "hopes that the USG will exercise some influence over the Bangladesh Army and urge it to stay out of the electoral fray." (Ref B) Kumar backtracked, remarking that, "the U.S. may have more influence on the Bangladeshi military, as it is a remnant of the Pakistani army."

15. (C) Kumar stated that the U.S. and India have great

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convergence on Bangladesh policy, but the GOI was still concerned about the USG's "lack of conviction" regarding JI's links to terror. He also asserted that the GOI "does not understand" the USG view that entry into the political mainstream will moderate the JI. Further, he insisted that the U.S. was biased toward the BNP and JI and pointed out that, "the Bangladeshis are very aware of it." Polcouns reminded Kumar that A/S Boucher requested on his November visit that the GOI share intelligence on the JI, as the USG was "willing to listen." He noted that, to his knowledge, no information has been provided. He declared that Kumar's claims of bias were inaccurate.

16. (C) Focusing on the upcoming 2007 Bangladeshi elections, Kumar emphasized that the U.S. and GOI need to establish markers for election credibility and offered that the voter list was the primary problem. He noted that, "we need to make the same kind of noise on this." He observed that, "the AL may boycott the election if the issue is not resolved, and the election may not take place." Polcouns replied that he would convey the idea to Washington.

----- Burma: No arms trading -----

17. (C) Touching on Burma, Polcouns told Kumar that "a number of credible sources" pointed to past and continuing Indian military assistance to the Burmese junta. Kumar denied the reports and insisted that "no lethal defense supplies" were being sent to Burma. Polcouns reminded Kumar that, "Burma will not go away," and averred that it behooves the GOI to discuss its Burma policy openly with U/S Burns and set the right tone for the burgeoning U.S.-India relationship during his December 7 and 8 meetings with FS Menon. Kumar said that he would convey the information through the proper channels and retorted that the U.S. may be trivializing "threats to the region" when it groups Burma with rogue governments like North Korea.

----- COMMENT: Conflicting Accounts -----

18. (C) COMMENT: Kumar's confidence that the Bangladesh army will remain in its barracks during the pre-election period appears not to be shared by his boss, Foreign Secretary ShivShankar Menom. We took notice when, during the 21 November Bangladesh Armed Forces Day reception, a Bangladeshi Brigadier General studiously refrained from commenting on a Bangladesh High Commission senior staffer's observations to poloff that he feared that the army would intervene and impose military rule to stop the "two ladies" from their constant bickering and restore political stability. As for Burma, Kumar's denials ring hollow in the face of credible reports to the contrary. END COMMENT.
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